

Legend Of Voracious Bear Based On Fact

By Emile J. Hodcl

Some time ago we received a very nice letter from a 25-year-old resident of Buckeye, up in Pocahontas County between Millpoint and Marlinton if memory does not fail us. He is F. W. Ruckman.

This septuagenarian wrote, "Your paper seems to be gaining much favor in my county. I've heard it said that to learn what is going on in Pocahontas we should read the Beckley Post-Herald.

"I am intrigued by the historical articles by Shirley Donnelly.

"Just recently I found written proof of a legend I have heard all my life and am sending it along. If you find it of interest, you are welcome to use it."

The truth is that we do find the account of more than passing interest. Since it is somewhat long for a day's column, we are taking the liberty of splitting it into two sections and using it herein.

We have been saving it for use at this time — we are on vacation this week — and will write Reader F. W. Ruckman as soon as possible on our return to the office and normal duties. We want to get from him additional information on another subject about which he has written. It seems that he has had a great personal experience during his life which may also merit telling in the columns of the Post-Herald.

But now to the story of a Pocahontas County legend — a legend of bear country which has been shown to have some basis in fact. Though the written record is only a bare mention of a tragic event, the details supplied are those which have been handed down by word of mouth among Pocahontas people.

By F. W. Ruckman

A legend, hoary with age, old as the nation, and the only one of its kind in our state, so far as I have been able to learn was recorded by no less an authority than Bishop Francis Ashbury.

My son, who learned to read and write, got on sheets recently and went on a journey up to the settlement at Morgantown. There he saw in the Bishop Ashbury's three-volume journal some facts about things that happened right here (in the Buckeye region of Pocahontas County).

The legend is that some one hundred and sixty-seven years ago a bear came into a clearing where a man was working in the field and carried off and ate a child.

Naturally details became foggy after so great a time, causing argument as to the name of the family, the exact location, and some even doubted that it ever happened. My interest was rekindled when I read Bishop Ashbury's journal entry and I set out to learn what the story turned down to.

Mr. Ed Bullitt, who was raised on the opposite side of the mountain from me, and who of us about a cross-sectioned mile from the scene of the tragedy, had the pleasant recollection. His father was a native bear-killer, so was his grandfather, Mary Carkley.

The name of the family, they remembered, was Naylor. The young pioneer had built a little cabin on a rolling knoll in a low grove in the mountain. He had raised a field and was planting it in the spring with a homemade hull-tongue plow.

Mrs. Naylor was "lookin' poorly," as the father, wanting to be certain, took the child along to the field. The day was warm and sunny. The child was left in a comfortable spot where the father could see it as he passed by while at work.

As was provided with the terrified father saw a large bear carrying the screaming child into the forest.

The father's frantic calls were heard by the Cochran, an Irish immigrant family, who had settled at the foot of the mountain a short time before. Pursuit and search revealed some fragments of clothing and slight traces of the child on Little Mountain, about two miles distant.

The Naylor must have left the country soon afterwards since I find no other mention of the name.

BECKLEY, W. VA., THURSDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 17, 1957



People Rushed From Here After Bear, Stolen Child

This is a picture of the Cochran house, located in Pocahontas County. Pocahontas is the setting for a legend dealing with a bear. The full legend is recounted in the "Top O' The Morning" column on this page. The narrative and this picture were provided by F. W. Ruckman of Buckeye. Ruckman reports the farm and house were purchased by David L. Ruckman in 1832, and have been in possession of the Ruckman clan ever since. He comments on the removal of the old house as follows: "It (the

house) should have been preserved as a monument to the pioneers, who with faith, powder, an axe, and intestinal fortitude, carved out of the wilderness fertile farms; built comfortable homes; left us a rich heritage which we should nourish and perpetuate."

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Mrs. Ed Boblett, who was raised on the opposite side of the mountain from me, and both of us about a crow-measured mile from the scene of the tragedy, had the clearest version. Her mother was a natural born historian, as was her great-aunt, Mary Cackley.

The name of the family, they remembered, was Naylor. The young pioneer had built a little cabin on a rolling bench in a low gap in the mountain. He had cleared a field and was plowing it in the spring with a homemade bull-tongue plow.

Mrs. Naylor was "feelin' poorly," so the father, wishing to be helpful, took the child along to the field. The day was warm and sunny. The child was left in a comfortable spot where the father could see it as he passed by while at work.

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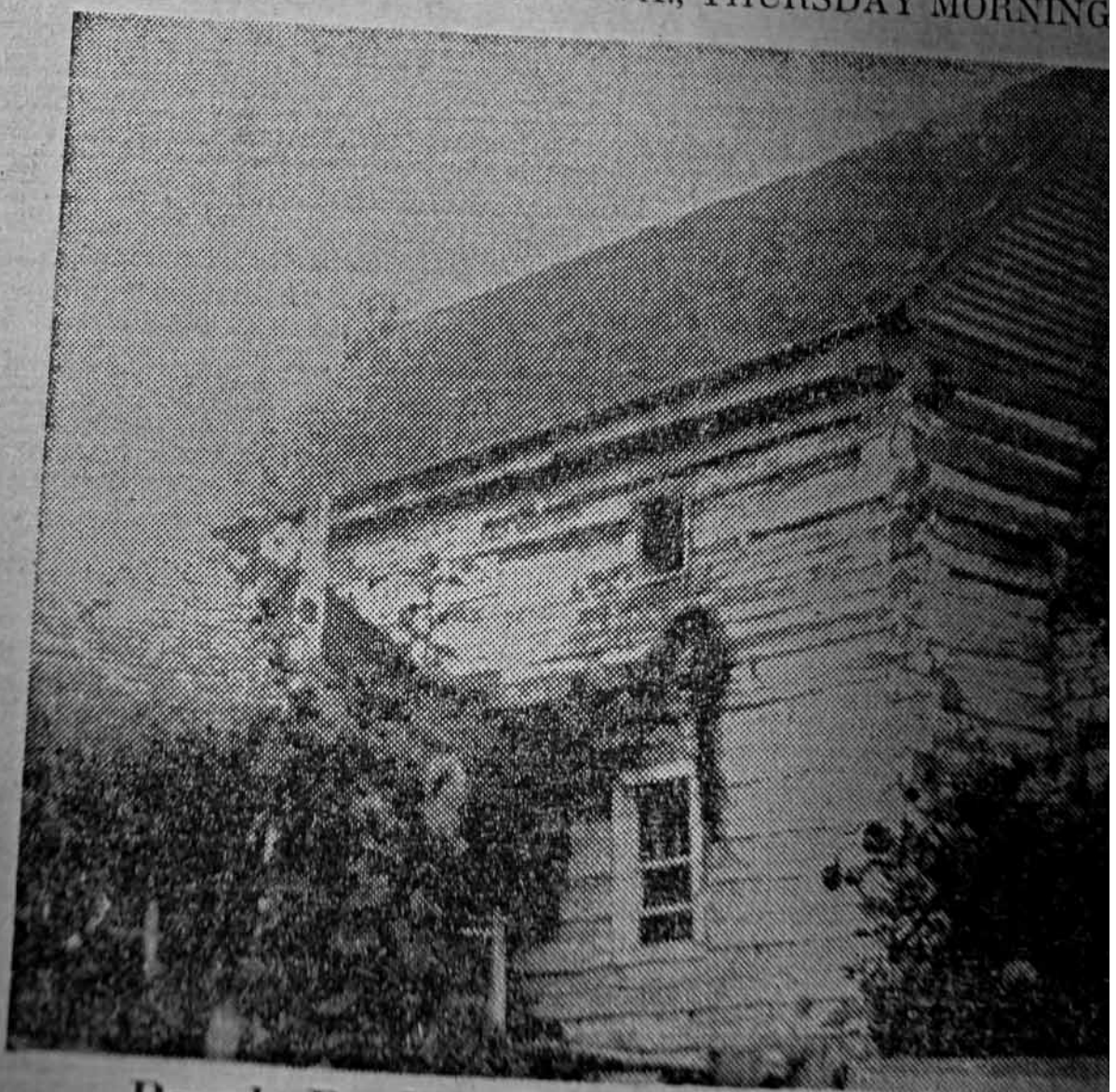
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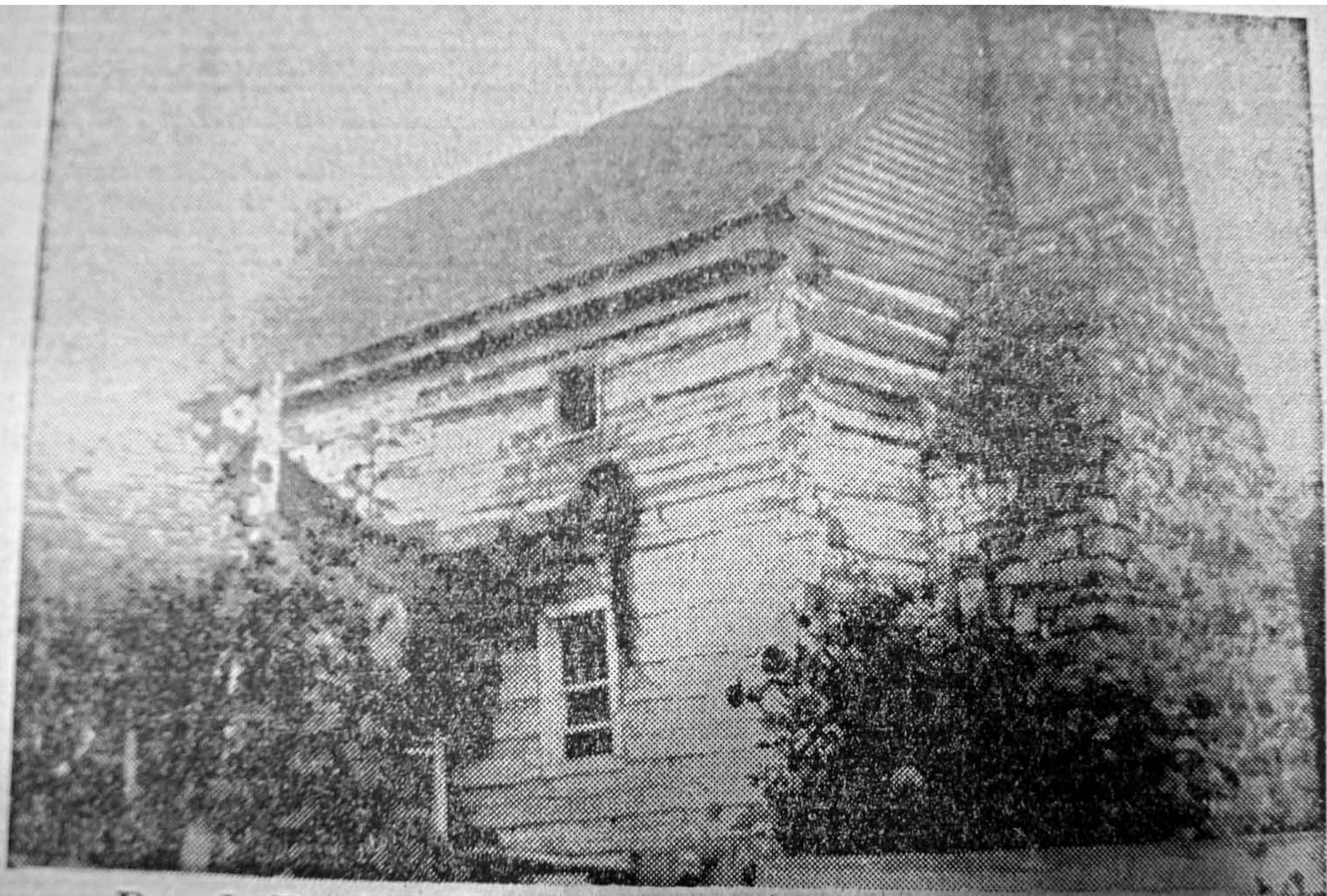


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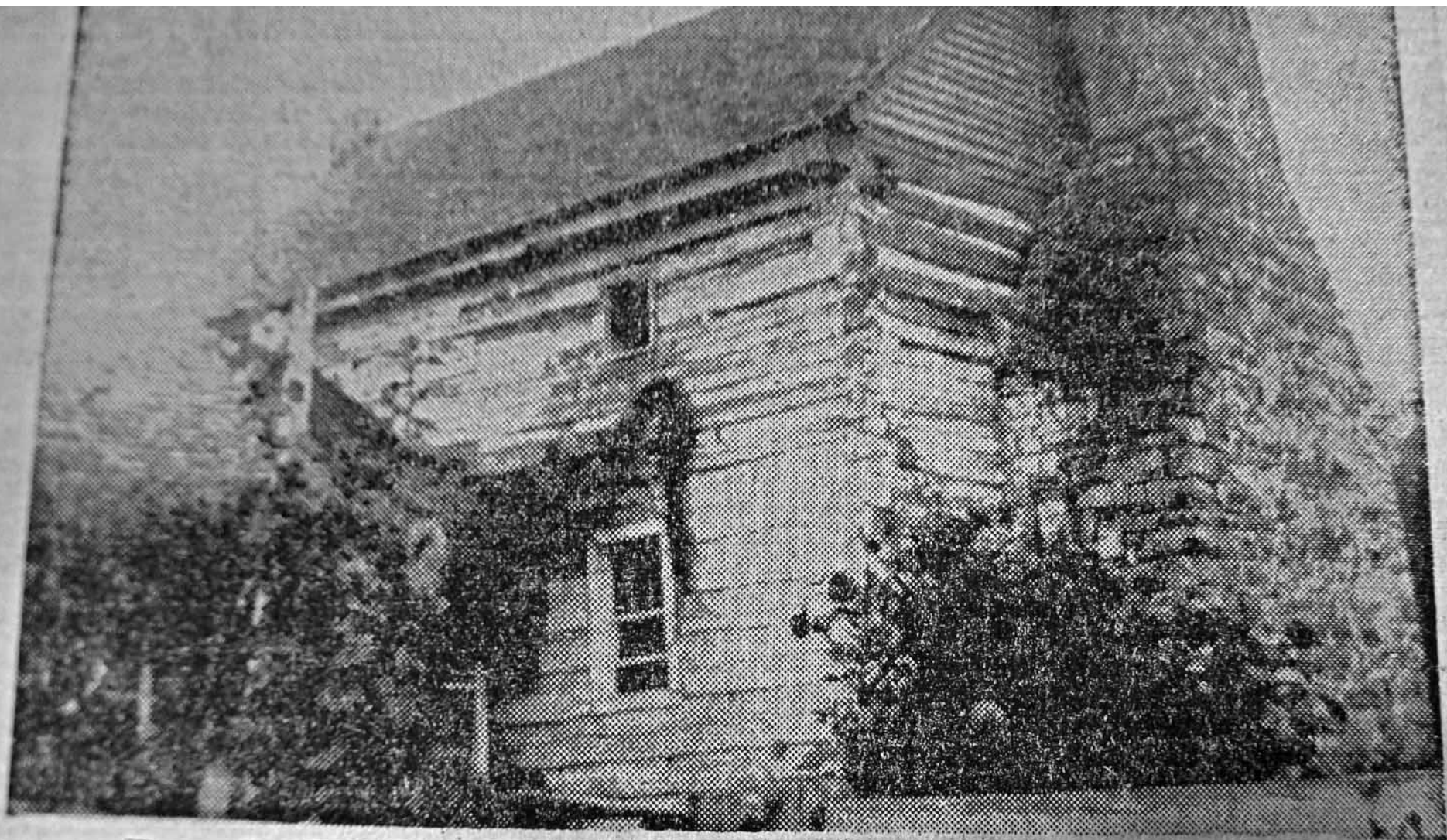


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